

Parental conflict

What parental conflict looks like

- Constructive conflict is a natural part of any relationship, however there can be conflict between parents/ carers which likely involves frequent, intense and poorly resolved disagreements. There may be a toxic atmosphere, parents might be emotionally unavailable to each other or feeling isolated.
- Children are adversely affected by this destructive conflict between their parents.
- Parents are either living together or separated, and could be biological, step or adopted parents or carers.
- There is **no** consistent pattern of victim or abuser, and no power difference within the relationship.
- The family would **not** be considered to be experiencing 'domestic abuse', i.e. there is **no** physical violence, **coercion or control**.

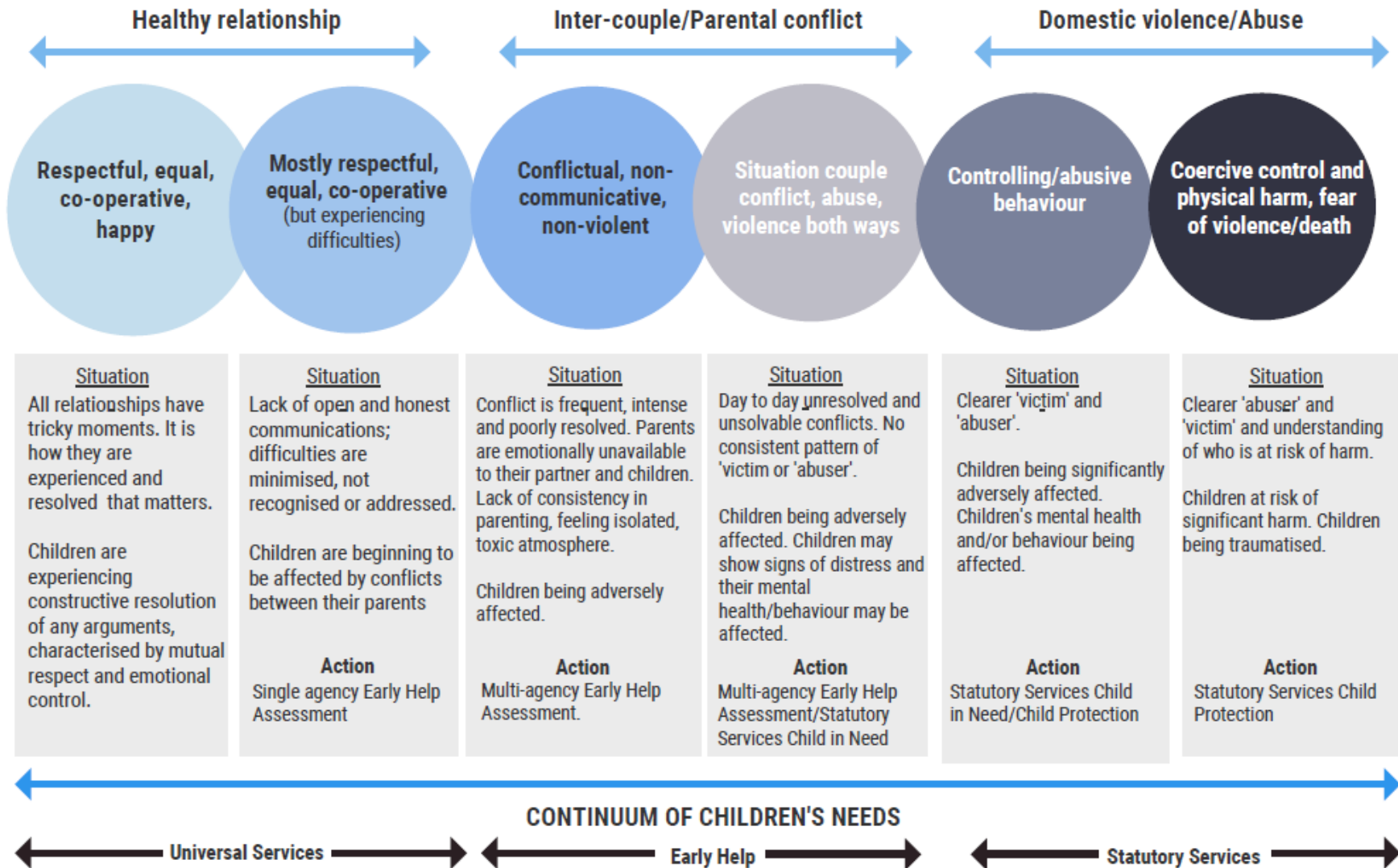
Impact of parental conflict

- Evidence shows that destructive parental conflict can have a negative impact on children, particularly in terms of mental health, problems at school, sleep difficulties and poorer health. This is regardless of whether the parents/ carers are together or separated.
- The risk of destructive conflict between parents is higher at crucial points in family life, such as becoming pregnant, having a baby, a child starting or changing school, or separation and divorce, job loss, added financial pressures etc.

The questions below can help to explore where on the continuum a relationship may sit, helping to identify and distinguish between parental conflict and domestic abuse.

• What aspects of your relationship trouble you?	
• What would you change if you had the opportunity?	
• How understanding is your partner?	
• How safe do you feel at home and in your relationship?	This is a really important question to ask, if the parent clearly feels safe, this would tend to suggest they are experiencing parental conflict and may appreciate further discussion,

	<p>information about sources of self-help and/or referral into local relationships support services.</p> <p>If the parent says they are scared or sometimes feel unsafe at home, this would tend to indicate that the parents are on the domestic abuse side of the spectrum (including on the domestic abuse side of 'situational couple conflict and abuse') so a referral into local domestic abuse pathways and processes might be appropriate</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How confident do you feel about making decisions? • How comfortable do you feel about expressing your own views and opinions? • How much choice do you have about your own life and family life? 	<p>These questions might indicate the presence of coercive or controlling behaviour within the relationship.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where is the joy in your life? 	<p>Those in an abusive relationship may feel the lack of joy in their life and start to see the reality of their situation.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would your children say about life at home? • What changes, if any have you noticed in your children's behaviour? 	<p>These questions could lead to a discussion about the impact on the children who may be experiencing conflict or abuse between their parents.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What prevents you from asking for support? 	<p>This question may lead to a discussion about how the parent and/or family could be enabled to access the support they need.</p>



Adapted from the model developed by Dr Mark Farrall, referenced by Hertfordshire County Council